

these issues are more than we can bear, talk to me. I think I have been pretty reasonable in setting these out. But I have gone over these with the Republican leader, and I am happy to sit down and talk to him if he thinks that some of them are a bridge too far. But this, in my opinion, is what we need to do so that the Senate is respectful of the wishes of the American people.

A couple of other things. I do not think it is good for us that we try to accomplish nothing. I remind my Republican colleagues, and perhaps I do not need to do this, that the root of continued obstructionism is not without cost. Most importantly, it comes at a cost to the American people who are facing Medicare cuts, increasing home foreclosure, ever increasing gas prices, because Republicans refused to work with us last work period.

But continued obstruction is, I believe, in my opinion, coming at a cost to our Republican colleagues themselves as well. The American people see with clear eyes that our country's economic crisis continues to grow worse. The Republicans have dragged their heels. It is not coincidental that we have had editorials all over the country—I am not going point to those—indicating that the Republicans have to work more to get things done.

But there is good reason to show that Americans favor a Democratic control of Congress by the widest margin in the history of polling. Never, never has there been a wide margin between Democrats and Republicans as to who the American people feel will do a better job taking care of our country. So maybe after a week back home among family, friends, constituents, my Republican colleagues are ready to walk away from the small handful of their colleagues who insist upon inaction. Maybe enough voters back home explained to my friends on the other side of the aisle exactly how urgently they need help.

If so, I say to my Republican colleagues, I am here, we are here to work with you. It is not too late to be the 60th vote on Medicare and join us on housing, alternative fuels. I hope the July 4 recess will be remembered as a turning point for this Congress, and we can now move forward with the same urgency the American people feel to find common ground and change our country as it desperately needs changing.

The turning point can begin now. The Republicans can allow us to move forward and debate legislation to lower gas prices, invest in clean, renewable, alternative energy. I am not going to go over a list of unanimous-consent requests; I have done that in the past. I simply want to say, let's not have these objections to these pieces of legislation. Let's try to work together.

We frankly have had—and I spoke to a Republican Senator today, saying: We need more opportunity to offer amendments. I said to my friend, a Republican Senator: You know, we are in

the throes of a Presidential election. We have at the most about 9 weeks of legislative time before that election.

On opportunities that we had to legislate, where we brought to the floor pieces of legislation that were open to amendment, here is what we got: The 18-cent tax holiday was an effort of JOHN MCCAIN to do a campaign issue. Senator OBAMA said it was a political gimmick and it didn't go anywhere. Also on the GI bill of rights, as my friend the Presiding Officer will acknowledge, we had an open piece of legislation. What do they want to offer on that? Something to change the GI bill of rights because Senator MCCAIN said it was too generous. On housing, we want to legislate on housing. And when other issues come up, that is what we want to legislate on.

We are not going to have this as an opportunity to do a Presidential election here in the Senate. We have elections all over the country, and we have enough to do.

I would hope my friends will respond to the deafening calls from their constituents to take action. Instead of working with us on legislation to lower gas prices, they propose that we lease more land to oil companies. We participated in that. I led the effort over here, with a number of other Senators, to get Senators to go along with drilling in the gulf. We did that. We did that. But it is interesting, we have been told by those companies that any new offshore drilling, if they decide that is what they want to do, will take at least 2 years before they can get a piece of equipment to drill offshore. They don't have any. So we are not blind to the American people looking to every opportunity they can. We are not knee-jerk opposed to drilling, but we do acknowledge that our great country, with the wonderful natural resources Lewis and Clark and others discovered—we have less than 3 percent of the oil in the entire world, and that counts ANWR and all the offshore—less than 3 percent. We use more than 25 percent of all the oil that is used in the world. We use 21 million barrels a day 7 days a week. We are open to any reasonable approach that will lower gas prices, but let's also not forget that the oil industry already leases 68 million acres in America that they aren't using.

The State of Nevada is the seventh largest State in the Union. The 68 million acres is about the size as the State of Nevada. That is a lot of area to drill on. If you go from the southern tip of the State of Nevada to the northern tip of the State of Nevada, that is at least 750 miles. It is wide. At the top, it is about 400 miles wide. That is a lot of area to drill. That is how much land and offshore they have to drill on right now.

So even if the Republican proposal were enacted, it would take years and even decades to conduct exploration to begin drilling. Even then, the plan wouldn't lower gas prices. But we are

willing to take a look at any proposal like that. As I indicated, we helped get offshore drilling in the gulf.

So instead of proposing legislation that would just add more to the 68 million unused acres, I think we should try something that might be a little better than that. We are willing to do whatever is reasonable. We have done so in the past. As I indicated, in 2006, we helped pass a bipartisan plan for drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Republicans can work with us to end speculation on the oil markets that contributes tangibly to higher prices at the pump. I talked here a few minutes ago about how there appears to be bipartisan support for doing something about speculation. I will come to my Republican colleagues before the end of the week with a proposal on which I hope we can pick up Republican support. Is the plan I am going to come up with perfect? Of course not. But we have been doing a lot of work. I have a number of meetings, some of which are in the evening this week. If my Republican colleagues want to add something to this speculation thing to make it better, we will work with them.

The main thing, though, is that we have to work to make America, a country that contains less than 3 percent of the world's supply of oil, energy independent by investing in renewables, clean renewables. These steps would lower gas prices in the short term and it would create jobs, hundreds of thousands of jobs, clean jobs, high-paying jobs.

I hope that this next work period, we can work together and accomplish a lot for America. I have tried to outline here for my colleagues, both Democrats and Republicans, what is in store for us this next work period.

I look forward to leaving here for the conventions, during the time we are gone, which will bring us a new President. Hopefully, we will walk out of here with our shoulders back and our heads held high that we have been able to accomplish something this work period.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader.

GAS PRICES REDUCTION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, there is no question what the No. 1 issue is on the minds of the American people. It is the price of gas at the pump. It is literally off the charts. For those of us who have looked at surveys over the years, it is hard to recall, other than the post-9/11 period, a single issue that has enjoyed this kind of dominance in public opinion polls in America. I was home last week. I heard from a lot of Kentuckians on this issue. I know I wasn't the only one hearing the same thing. The high price of gas is the No. 1 issue facing Americans at this time. It should be the No. 1 issue for the Senate. Americans are hurting. They have every right to expect their elected representatives to actually do

something about it. We need to take up and pass legislation which not only makes a statement but which also makes a difference.

Just before the Fourth of July holiday, 44 Republicans introduced the Gas Price Reduction Act, a series of proposals to increase American energy production, to increase conservation, and to make sure that excessive speculation is not driving up the price of oil; basically, find more, use less. This is the only legislation that has been offered that has both a real chance to pass and will truly help consumers at the pump.

The find more provisions include increased exploration on the outer continental shelf, where States want it, and lifting the ban on western oil shale exploration. Under use less, we propose incentivizing the development of plug-in electric cars and trucks, and the advanced batteries needed to power them.

We can and should increase development of alternative sources of energy. But conservation, alone, is not the way out of this problem. The current spike in energy prices is a supply and demand problem, not a demand and demand problem. If prices are going to come down, we need to find more energy at home and use less. We must do both.

The goal of finding more energy at home, rather than relying on the Middle East, is not a fantasy. America is already the No. 3 oil producer in the world, and a number of States have indicated they would like to open up the area off their coasts to even more oil exploration, but they are prohibited by a Federal ban. At \$4.10 a gallon, this nationwide ban no longer makes sense. It should be lifted with prices where they are now. It should be up to individual States to decide whether to allow exploration 50 miles off their coasts.

We should also lift the ban on oil shale development which the new Democratic congress enacted last year. Our western States are sitting on a sea of oil three times as large as the oil reserves in Saudi Arabia. Yet at the insistence of the Democratic majority, we are not allowed to touch it. They have put a 100 percent ban on oil shale exploration. With gas prices at more than \$4 a gallon, this prohibition makes no sense.

Some on the other side say that opening up new off-shore exploration or using oil shale would not have an immediate effect and therefore should not be done at all. But the effect of allowing new exploration at home would send a clear signal to the international markets that we are willing to take serious steps to increase supply even while we move to conserve.

There is already a strong bipartisan consensus on the importance of conservation. In addition to working with our friends on the other side late last year to pass the first increase in fuel efficiency standards in more than three decades, Republicans are also looking

in this bill to conserve energy by spurring the development of plug-in electric cars and trucks.

But conservation alone won't resolve this problem. Conservation is just one side of the problem. We need to find more and use less, if we want to bring prices down.

Finally, I know there have been concerns that oil speculators are contributing to the rising price of gas. Our bill addresses this concern through putting more cops on the beat at the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, increasing transparency and strengthening U.S. futures markets.

The Gas Price Reduction Act is a dramatic step in the right direction. In putting it together, Republicans were careful to focus on proposals that already have support from the other side of the aisle. We are not interested in simply making a statement. We are determined to address the problem. We want to pass legislation which will make a difference to families feeling the pinch.

This bill contains provisions that should be agreeable to both sides of the aisle. It tackles both sides of the energy issue by increasing supply and curbing demand. We should do both.

There are many important issues facing the Congress, but few are more important than addressing the issue of energy. It is time to act, and this balanced approach is a good start.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, before my friend leaves the floor, I think there should be an opportunity, based on his statement and my statement, to do something about gas prices. We have introduced a piece of legislation we have had. We have had votes on it here before. It deals with a number of issues, including whether OPEC should be subject to the antitrust laws, which the former chairman of the Judiciary Committee and now ranking member thinks is very important, as does Senator KOHL and others on our side. That is part of ours. There are a number of issues. But to get everybody to agree that everything in it is good is difficult.

That is the same problem we are going to have with the proposal my friend talks about, the so-called new Republican piece of legislation. From what I have said and what he has said, it seems that we could certainly get together and agree on, if not all of both packages, some, and move forward.

For example, I mentioned this speculation thing. Maybe we can do that. I come from the western part of the United States. That is where most of the oil shale is. We had a great program going in the 1970s, when suddenly we took away the tax incentives for more work on oil shale. This isn't anything I personally think is repugnant. I think it is something we should take a look at. I have already given my views on offshore drilling and onshore drilling.

So we want to work together. The message that I hope comes from our

discussion early this afternoon is that Democrats and Republicans want to try to do something about gas prices. Hopefully, during this next work period we can do it.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, not by way of rebuttal but agreeing with the majority leader, the American people are demanding that we do something. They are not kidding about this issue. I appreciate the spirit of the remarks of the majority leader. Just to give an example of the shifting views on this, a Pew poll just announced last week, taken very recently, indicates that just among political liberals alone, just to give one snapshot of how the public is evolving on this issue, the number of liberals, liberals only, who favor increased energy exploration doubled. That is just among a subset of the American population. The American people are demanding that we act.

I appreciate the comments of the majority leader. Hopefully, we will be able to find a way to do both things, both to find more and to use less.

I yield the floor.

ORDER FOR MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if my friend will yield for a unanimous consent request, I now ask unanimous consent that there be a period of 1 hour for morning business—we have a number of Senators who want to come over and talk—with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each during that hour's period of time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Oregon.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I just spent a week at home listening to Oregonians describe their concerns, virtually all of which include the word "bill." As we have heard today on the Senate floor, it is sure to be "gasoline bill." But it might also be "medical bill" or "food bill" or "credit card bill" or "tuition bill" or "tax bill" or "housing bill." Taken together, it is obvious these bills are hitting millions of our people like a wrecking ball.

In addition, millions more Americans see themselves walking an economic tightrope. For example, many of our